

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



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QUALITY ASSURANCE DIVISION LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION BUREAU PROVIDER INFORMATION NOTICE – #111907

Personal Linens/ Facility Laundry Requirements

The State Survey Agency received several inquiries regarding laundry processing requirements for patient or resident personal clothing. Questions regarding the definition of linens, the intent of LTC Tag F445, CAH Tag C028, and Hospital Tag A07047, and resident rights and laundry detergent composition have been raised.

The state agency has consulted with the regional CMS office. Patient/residents clothing and personal items are considered “linen” for the purpose of measuring compliance with Tags F445, C028, and A7047. This provider information notice is specific to patient/resident personal linens/clothing.

The state agency’s concern is potential infection control problems with the manner in which soiled resident or patient personal clothing is handled, transported, and processed in the facility. Hygienic and common sense separation, storage and processing of clean and soiled linen is recommended.

Soaps, surfactants and/or detergents act to loosen soil and have some antimicrobial properties. Hot water provides an effective means of destroying microorganisms, and a temperature of at least 71 C (160 F) for a minimum of 25 minutes is commonly recommended for hot-water washing. The use of chlorine bleach provides an extra margin of safety. The temperatures reached in drying and especially during ironing provide additional significant microbicidal action.

To minimize possible contamination of the environment, individual red plastic bags should be used when gathering personal linen from residents with:

Herpes simplex or herpes zoster, if personal linen has come in to contact with lesions and especially wet personal linen; MRSA infections or colonization; cutaneous infections not adequately contained with dressing; Chicken pox; linen visibly soiled with blood or a large amount of body fluid; linen removed from isolation; or any other infectious agent, or suspected infectious agent, that would require implementation of universal precautions.

The Department has researched the use of lower temperature processing of linens. Instead of hot water, microbiocidal action low-temperature laundry cycles rely heavily on the presence of bleach to reduce levels of microbial contamination. If low temperature, less than 70 C (160 F) laundry cycles are used, chemicals suitable for low-temperature washing at proper use concentrations for the require time of exposure should be used. Recent studies have shown that a satisfactory reduction of microbial contaminations can be achieved at lower water temperatures of 22 C (71 F) – 50 C (122 F) when the cycling of the washer, the wash formula, and the amount of chlorine bleach or other chemicals are carefully monitored and controlled.

The State survey agency has concluded the following methods are approved for processing patient/resident clothing in health care facilities.

- 1) The facility can process the resident item with the facility linens using the recommended hot water and drying temperatures.
- 2) The facility can use a cold water laundry product. Choose chemicals suitable for low-temperature washing at proper use concentrations. The facility shall maintain the laundry product data sheets showing the microbicidal effectiveness of the product. A policy shall be developed to implement the manufacturers recommended water temperature, processing sequence, and product exposure duration to the linen, adequate to provide sanitizing.
- 3) The facility can red bag and send the personal item to a commercial dry cleaner. Dry cleaning of soiled fabrics renders them free of the risk of pathogen transmission.
- 4) The personal item could be red bagged and given to the family.